

Earth Day 2012



Career Profile

Name: Charlene Sauls
Job Title: Licensed Professional Geologist
Location: Southcentral Regional Office
Years with DEP: 13

What kinds of activities do you perform on a daily basis?

I work in the Waste Management Program so my job duties are to make sure wastes are properly disposed of. The program permits municipal, residual and hazardous waste landfills and industrial facilities and monitors them to make sure they are operating in accordance with state and federal regulations. If not properly operated, these facilities have the potential to pollute the groundwater, surface water, soil and air. I also evaluate historic facilities that may have caused pollution in the past. These evaluations are done in order to determine if there are any present-day exposures to human health or the environment due to improper historic disposal practices. Some of my job duties include:

- Review of groundwater, surface water, soil and air analytical data collected from regulated, unregulated and closed historic facilities.
- Perform site inspections to investigate handling of wastes at historic facilities and at currently regulated/unregulated facilities.
- Review environmental investigative reports and proposals.
- Gather all available data and create GIS maps with current data to help evaluate environmental problems.
- Work as a team to make decisions and solve problems related to regulated and unregulated facilities.
- Review permit applications and closure plans for landfills and residual/hazardous waste facilities.
- Coordinate permits for industrial facilities that treat/store/dispose municipal, residual and hazardous waste.

What kind of educational background do you have?

I have a bachelor's degree in geology and a master's degree in secondary science education from the University of Houston.

What is the most challenging part of your job?

The most challenging part of my job is trying to get facility operators to abide by state and federal regulations pertaining to proper waste disposal/treatment/storage. I am always learning new applicable state and federal regulations. Gathering of all data by sifting through historic files and internet databases can also be a challenge. I also have to keep up with the latest technology so that projects can be more efficiently evaluated. Finally, coordinating with other DEP programs and EPA in order to satisfy all groups involved and regulations can be an issue.

What got you interested in working in an environmental field?

I have always been interested in the earth, geology and the environment; however as a result of being from Houston, I began my career as a petroleum geologist exploring for oil and gas in the Gulf of Mexico. In the late 1980s, after a move from Texas to Pennsylvania due to the cyclic oil industry, I entered the environmental field after applying for a geologist position with the PADER in 1989. The job satisfied my love for geology, the environment and my desire to protect the earth and people in the present and future. I know the earth is irreplaceable so it is important for me to help preserve it.

What is the most rewarding part of your job?

The most satisfying aspect of my job is knowing that I am helping to keep the commonwealth beautiful, clean and safe for people to live. Being a part of a group who dedicates their lives to protecting the environment is also very rewarding. To know that the groundwater, air and soils are being cleaned up to save human health and ecological standards is a great feeling.

What advice do you have for someone thinking about a career in environmental science?

If you love the earth and want to keep it safe for future generations, a career related to environmental science is a very satisfying and enjoyable one. Working with a group of scientists who share the same passion is a very rewarding experience.